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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003440

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR PHU

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)

SUBJECT: NAVIGATING THAILAND-CAMBODIA RELATIONS NO EASY
TASK FOR THE MFA

REF: A. BANGKOK 3408 (BURMA DISCUSSION)

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3376 (PROGRESS...BORDER TALKS)

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Classified By: Political Counselor George Kent, Reason 1.4 (B, D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Thai MFA Director responsible for Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos revealed to us November 18 that Thailand-Cambodia relations have dominated his division's workload the past several years, even factoring in the 2007 Saffron Uprising, Cyclone Nargis, and the international profile of Burma policy. Kalayana Vipattipumiprates noted that the MFA faced a tight deadline to obtain parliamentary approval of a Joint Border Committee (JBC) plan to delineate disputed Thailand-Cambodia border areas in order to facilitate the next round of JBC meetings, scheduled for January. Kallayana shared his perspectives on the role played by unforgiving recollections of history and domestic political dynamics in Cambodia in shaping dynamics in ongoing Thailand-Cambodia border tensions.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Kallayana is one of the MFA's sharpest mid-level managers, is due for a rotation promotion in the end of year reshuffle, and likely will continue to rise in the Thai foreign service. His frankness about the difficulties in managing Thailand's relationship with Cambodia, aggravated by long-standing cultural and political dynamics in both countries, suggests that the road forward will continue to face twists and turns, as well as take priority in terms of focus over Burma policy (ref A). End Summary and Comment.

Managing Cambodia Relations Dominates Over Burma policy

[1](#)3. (C) Thai MFA Director of EAP Division II Kallayana told

us November 18 that Cambodia dominated his division's foreign policy work, and joked that management of Thailand-Cambodia relations caused him to "eat Tylenol like candy." He spent the majority of his time focusing on Cambodia policy, notwithstanding the Burma portfolio and developments like Cyclone Nargis and the Saffron Uprising in Burma. Cambodia policy affected multiple government agencies and had become a political issue in parliament (Note: bringing down former FM Noppadol Pattima). Fortunately, the MFA, the military, and other agencies coordinated well on Cambodia policy, he stated, and shared the same strategic perspective, even if there were occasionally minor differences of opinion.

Race Against Time For Thai Parliamentary Approval

¶4. (C) Kallayana described the momentum and atmosphere of the November 10-11 JBC meetings and wrap-up November 12 meeting between Foreign Ministers in Siem Reap last week (ref B) as positive, and said that "we argue with smiles." The next step is to secure parliamentary approval for the way forward outlined during the JBC meetings to delineate the disputed border areas, and to prepare the way for the next round of JBC meetings in January in Phuket, a location chosen due to the Cambodian FM's interest in visiting the island. The MFA faced a tight schedule, since the Parliament's current session ended November 28, and it would not reconvene until January 21. Without parliamentary approval, the process would again stall. (Note: The Thai parliament has a joint House-Senate session scheduled November 24-25 to consider international agreements, including the JBC efforts and draft papers for the upcoming ASEAN summit.)

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Sees Long-standing Cambodian Leader Resentment of Thailand

¶5. (C) Kallayana agreed with commentator Kavi Chongkittavorn's assessment that the main Cambodian actors like Hun Sen and Chea Sim carry significant chips on their shoulders vis--vis the Thai that dates back several decades that affect current dynamics, including Hun Sen's apparent use of the current Thai distraction on internal politics to try to rebalance the bilateral dynamic. Kallayana noted that Hun Sen first encountered the Thai as an enemy "fighting in the jungle" while Thailand supported their opponents, and then dealt with them during the Paris Peace Negotiations (ending in 1991). Even though Kallayana felt that Thailand treated the Cambodians as negotiating equals in Paris, Hun Sen and Chea Sim still viewed Thailand as not giving them the respect they deserve, either in Paris or now.

Intra-CPP Tensions Shift Focus to Border

¶6. (C) Kallayana suggested one of the factors in the dynamics of Cambodian policy towards the border dispute was intraparty tension between different factions within the Cambodian People's Party (CPP); Hun Sen did not control all CPP MPs, particularly the faction headed by Senate President Chea Sim. Kallayana assessed that Hun Sen's desire to remain the unquestioned leader prompted him to adopt a more aggressive stance on the border.

JOHN